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The Imbalance in Iraqi Security Force Transition

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract

Aviation and aviation support functions have not been properly addressed in the transition of American security forces to Iraqi security forces. An imbalance in military capability exists that will threaten future Iraqi security and lead to undesired risk to Americans. American security forces in Iraq currently operate in a joint model of operations that includes ground forces, aviation and aviation support forces, logistics forces, and command and control forces. While the ground force transition is moving forward at a measured pace, too little is being done to train and transition aviation and aviation support assets to keep pace with the ground transition. The continued reliance on American aviation functions in support of the Iraqi ground force transition will ultimately lead to an Iraqi ground force trained and conditioned to integrate aviation into their operational construct but completely reliant on American aviation to support that requirement. If more attention is not given to training and transitioning a robust Iraqi aviation support function, the United States will find itself in a precarious situation that could take many years to correct—years that current political and policy decision makers may not consider worthwhile. Without a capable aviation function tied to a similar ground transition timeline, the overall joint transition to Iraqi security forces could fail in the end.

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Introduction

The United States is currently embroiled in an extremely difficult situation in Iraq. One key to success will be an effective transition from United States led security force operations to operations planned, led, and executed by Iraqi security forces.¹ Significant gains have been made in the transition.² However, aviation and aviation support functions have not been properly addressed in the transition of American security forces to Iraqi security forces. This has led to an imbalance in joint military capability that will threaten future Iraqi security and lead to undesired risk to Americans.

American security forces in Iraq currently operate jointly. This joint force includes ground forces, aviation and aviation support forces, logistics forces, and command and control forces. While the ground force transition is moving forward at a measured pace, too little is being done to train and transition aviation and aviation support assets to keep pace with the ground transition. The continued reliance on American aviation functions in support of the Iraqi ground force transition will ultimately lead to an Iraqi ground force trained and conditioned to integrate aviation into their operational construct but completely reliant on American aviation to support that requirement.

If transitioning the aviation support function to the Iraqi military does not receive more attention, the United States will soon find itself in a precarious situation that could take significant time to correct—time that political decision makers may not consider worthwhile. Without a capable aviation function tied to a similar ground transition timeline, the overall joint transition to Iraqi security forces could fail.

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

1. U.S. President, *National Strategy For Victory in Iraq*, 8-13.

2. Independent Commission On The Security Forces Of Iraq, *The Report Of The Independent Commission On The Security Forces of Iraq*, 7-15.

One must ask if United States policy makers are willing to accept independent Iraqi ground forces operating far from American or Allied ground commanders, yet using an American military to coordinate, control, and perhaps deliver aviation kinetic effects against a target that has not been vetted by an American targeting or rules of engagement process. Significant action must be taken to increase the development and training of not only the Iraqi Air Force but also ground support and airspace deconfliction functions generally resident in ground force formations. Without refocusing the aviation transition effort, Americans on the ground and in the air could be executing aviation support to Iraqi ground forces that are not under the control of or necessarily operating within the tenants of American policy or doctrine.

This paper will identify the strategic environment that predicates a balanced and time sensitive joint security force transition. It will highlight the imperatives for synchronizing various aviation related functions with the progress of the ground force transition. It will explore the time, training, and equipment challenges of building a relevant aviation enabler for ground forces. Finally, it will provide recommendations for synchronizing the Iraqi aviation force transition in critical areas that include: communications; aviation delivered fires; airspace management; and formal training development.

Security Transition Strategy and Policy

Some may argue that the initial planning for post conflict security and stabilization in Iraq was poor. Clearly more could have been done at the strategy and policy level of the United States Government to provide a better plan and more assets to effectively transition. Nevertheless, the President and his policy advisers sought to correct that mistake in 2005

with the publishing of the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq.³ One stated national objective is “to develop the Iraqis’ capacity to secure their country while carrying out a campaign to defeat terrorists and neutralize the insurgency.”⁴ Among the expectations is, “that our force posture will change over the next year, as the political process consolidates and as Iraqi Security Forces grow and gain experience...as Iraqis take on more responsibility for security, Coalition forces will increasingly move to supporting roles in most areas...while our military presence may become less visible, it will remain lethal and decisive, able to confront the enemy wherever it may gather and organize.”⁵

Numerous metrics are defined in the national strategy and have been frequently addressed in public domain.⁶ Specifically, those measures that receive the greatest attention are “[t]he quantity and quality of Iraqi units...the percentage of operations conducted by Iraqis alone or with minor Coalition assistance...offensive operations conducted by Iraqi and Coalition forces...”⁷

The Iraqi National Security Strategy for 2007 to 2010—a policy document released by the Republic of Iraq—supports the same security objectives as the President’s strategy. Some highlights include, “as the first priority in the current period, Iraq’s Joint Forces will focus on defeating terrorism and insurgency as their primary mission...Iraq’s Joint Forces will achieve self-reliance such that only minimal external assistance and support are needed for accomplishing the primary mission.”⁸ Critical aspects identified by the Iraqi strategy are that all Iraqi Army divisions must eventually come under the control of the Iraqi government

3. U.S. President, *National Strategy For Victory in Iraq*.

4. *Ibid.*, 8.

5. *Ibid.*, 12.

6. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

7. *Ibid.*, 8-13.

8. Republic of Iraq. *Iraq First, Iraqi National Security Strategy, 2007-2010*, 25.

and that part of that self-reliance includes assuming full responsibility for support functions such as “supply stocks, fire support capabilities and the Air Force.”⁹

From both nations’ strategic documents it is clear that there is a requirement for eventual transition from an American-led security apparatus to an Iraqi-led apparatus. Both strategies specifically identify security and countering terrorism and insurgency as the highest short-term priorities. Both identify that there will be a certain reliance on specific aspects of coalition power prior to there being a complete transition to Iraqi security forces. Unfortunately, both are rather vague on what will constitute reasonable measures. One says, “with minor coalition assistance”¹⁰ and the other “only minimal external assistance and support are needed.”¹¹ This vagueness contributes to the imbalance between the ground forces and the aviation support they receive by allowing both nations an excuse to defer the aviation transition to a later time.

Analysis of the Security Force Transition Imbalance

Transitioning security responsibility in Iraq is clearly a mandate driven by policy that has recently gained added urgency and attention at the American national political level. This has led to increased pressure on the operational commanders in Iraq to complete the transition as effectively as possible under the shortest timeline. Since 2005, transition efforts—led by the Multi National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I)—have been broad based and generally effective. Accounts abound in the press and congressional

9. Republic of Iraq. *Iraq First, Iraqi National Security Strategy, 2007-2010*, 26-27.

10. U.S. President, *National Strategy For Victory in Iraq*, 13.

11. Republic of Iraq, *Iraq First, Iraqi National Security Strategy, 2007-2010*, 25.

testimony about the effectiveness of individual Iraqi battalions, brigades and in some cases divisions.¹²

Published figures indicate growing numbers of Iraqi ground forces (along with the associated battle space) being taken over by and controlled by Iraqi commanders. American teams work at the battalion level and below on a very direct and personal basis to train and assist the Iraqi ground forces in assuming responsibility.¹³ Unfortunately, while a ground formation controlling their own territory and operations is a large measure of success, those measures of readiness discount the need for a fully balanced joint force capable of self-reliance. The level of effort given to transitioning Iraqi aviation support—and the ability of the Iraqi ground forces to leverage aviation support in their counterterror and counterinsurgency fight—has not kept pace.

When measuring joint security forces, ground formations receive priority attention. By the very nature of their task, large numbers of people are required to man an effective security force. Division strength formations mean tens of thousands of people must be trained and equipped. Once the individuals have been identified, however, they can be trained relatively quickly. Additionally, compared to aviation units, they require less technical and lower cost equipment. Vast amounts of assets and time are being put towards the issue, resulting in training teams or advisers being assigned down to the lowest levels of the ground formations.¹⁴ Training has been consistent with strategic guidance that focuses the joint Iraqi security forces on security, counterterror, and counterinsurgency operations. The Iraqis' ability to operate on their own receives much of the attention. Taking nothing

12. U.S. Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2007 Report to Congress In Accordance with Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2007 (Section 9010, Public Law 109-289*, 30-40.

13. *Ibid.*, 37-39.

14. *Ibid.*, 30-40.

away from the huge success of these brave formations of Iraqis, it is interesting to note that those ground forces are operating “independently” while relying—with a few rare exceptions—on aviation support that has been planned, coordinated, and controlled by and through American service members.

The vast majority of aviation airspace control, fire support coordination, terminal attack control, logistics, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) are being conducted and controlled by specially trained American service members. The Iraqis’ ability to execute these functions is not improving at a pace that would allow successful integration.¹⁵ In stark contrast to ground force training, aviation functions generally require money, technologically advanced equipment, and advanced understanding of specific skill sets not often found in developing countries. Aviation functional success therefore tends to be measured by the number of “things” in the form of radars, airplanes, and communications equipment. People capable of executing aviation support functions are hard to come by and the training is costly and time consuming.

Transitioning aviation support for security operations therefore becomes a very difficult task. That task was admittedly put on a back burner with a vague recognition that it would take time and therefore has to come later in the game.¹⁶ This approach appears to have provided an excuse to delay what would be a costly and demanding task—with the caveat that American aviation support will be needed past the time when Iraqi ground forces are postured for independent operations. This overextended delay has created an

15. Independent Commission On The Security Forces Of Iraq, *The Report Of The Independent Commission On The Security Forces of Iraq*, 72. This assessment was observed first hand by the author’s experience as an aviator during four separate flying tours in Iraq beginning at the start of combat operations and ending in May 2007. His last two tours were as a squadron commander in the Al Anbar province.

16. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Stand up and Be Counted: The Continuing challenge of Building the Iraqi Security Forces*, 98.

imbalance.¹⁷ While there has been some growth in a very small Iraqi Air Force, the actual numbers of people, equipment, and training has been minuscule in comparison to the ground force of the new Iraqi joint force.¹⁸

As of August 2007, there were 359,700 ground forces trained in Iraq. That compares with 900 Iraqi Air Force personnel.¹⁹ The Iraqi Air Force operates a handful of small, fixed-wing aircraft for ISR, C-130 cargo planes for logistics, and are receiving approximately sixteen Huey helicopters for logistics and troop movement—totaling 45 aircraft in the Iraqi inventory.²⁰ As a point of comparison, the United States Marine Corps forces operating in what has been identified as a supporting effort in the Al Anbar Province, operate nearly six full helicopter squadrons, three full jet squadrons, one C-130 squadron, and a full maintenance and command and control system to support that effort.²¹ The Marine aviation contribution supports one division and totals approximately 4,500 Marines and over 130 aircraft. A rather large aviation element for only a portion of Iraq, and rather small in comparison to what the other services add to the theater's aviation support function. Nine hundred Iraqi Air Force members and a handful of aircraft pale in comparison.

Additionally, the details of training have been significantly overlooked in the process. Measuring the number of Iraqi aircraft that are flying—as small as that number really is—has superseded the measure of functional specifics that are needed to truly operate a joint ground and aviation security force in a security, counterterror or counterinsurgency role. Skill sets in

17. Independent Commission On The Security Forces Of Iraq, *The Report Of The Independent Commission On The Security Forces of Iraq*, 72.

18. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Stand up and Be Counted: The Continuing challenge of Building the Iraqi Security Forces*, 96-98.

19. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, *Iraq Weekly Status Report, August 15, 2007*, 8.

20. Independent Commission On The Security Forces Of Iraq, *The Report Of The Independent Commission On The Security Forces of Iraq*, 72.

21. Second Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), “2 MAW (FWD).”

communications, aviation delivered fires, airspace management, and formal training development require significant training. This training requires several months, and in some cases several years, to complete. Some of this training extends beyond the aviation force and is required in the ground force. It would be unreasonable to suggest that those skill sets should have been available at the start of the development of the joint Iraqi security force. However, the training in those skill sets should have been addressed earlier and more assertively so that as the Iraqi security force matured, those skill sets requiring long lead times in training were imbedded in aviation support functions. With a foundation in training, aviation support would be more balanced with the development and timing of independent Iraqi ground forces.²²

Successful ground forces ultimately rely on a broad spectrum of aviation support to enable the joint security force operations envisioned by both the United States and Iraqi policy expectations. The needed aviation training has not happened. Soon, the chasm between independently operating Iraqi ground forces and a responsive Iraqi aviation support system will grow so wide that a realistic expectation for a self-reliant joint Iraqi security force will not be a reality. This imbalance is due in part to a failure to integrated joint planning, training, and execution into the mantra of the transition—relying on stove-piped development of ground forces separate from aviation forces. This has resulted in one half of the equation—aviation—relying heavily on American support and capabilities.

Successful security, counterterror, and counterinsurgency operations require a joint force with responsive capabilities that are capable of leveraging available assets, quick to communicate changing environments, and certain of the conditions on the ground. When

22. Independent Commission On The Security Forces Of Iraq, *The Report Of The Independent Commission On The Security Forces of Iraq*, 76-77.

successful, aviation support is seamlessly tied to the needs, expectations, and requirements of the ground force. In order to enable security operations, aviation support needs to understand what information may be required of a ground commander and how to get that information to that commander. In addition, aviation support must be properly deconflicted to ensure safety and security of the aviation force, while providing flexible support to the ground force.

While an aviation force that is enabling operations has a responsibility to support the ground force, the ground force has a responsibility to meet a specific level of knowledge and proficiency in appropriately using that aviation support. In other words, both sides must come together to increase the synergistic affects of the joint capabilities of the force. The United States' model for aviation support of joint operations is very effective. Ironically, it is not being followed in the transition in Iraq.

Because of the complexity of aviation support to joint forces, the American armed forces have developed training policies, procedures and models that have proven very effective in ensuring ground and aviation forces are capable of executing complex aviation operations. The expertise of American forces in integrating ground and air operations has been a hallmark of success. The very people who have succeeded in ensuring that aviation is an effective enabler for ground forces are the ones in theater now executing the mission. The challenge is tying the expertise, training models, equipment, and technical skills together with the appropriate Iraqi forces that can then observe, learn, and develop skills in the effective joint use of aviation capabilities.²³

23. Independent Commission On The Security Forces Of Iraq, *The Report Of The Independent Commission On The Security Forces of Iraq*, 74.

Counterargument

Some may argue that there is not an imbalance in the security force transition. They may point to documentation that indicates that deliberate decisions established priorities that did not include the requirements identified in this paper. Deliberately prioritized or not, there is an undeniable lag in transitioning the aviation force in Iraq. Pressure to complete the transition continues to grow. Based on current political pressure to leave Iraq and the training time required to prepare aviation enablers, it would be hard to argue that the aviation transition is where it needs to be for success when the United States is eventually forced to turn over responsibility and leave the region. Nothing in the author's research indicates a concern for or an address of this imbalance.

Analytical Conclusions: Shortfalls and Recommendations

Several issues led to the imbalance in security force transition and serve as roadblocks to progress in providing a truly self-reliant joint force that can be an effective security, counterterror, and counterinsurgency force. Aviation assets and aviation training take significant time to build to a capacity that enables effective joint force synergy.

There will be a lag between ground force capability for independent operations and aviation force capability to independently operate and support those ground forces. That lag time, however, is critical. It cannot be wasted waiting for aircraft to be built, systems to be produced, or aviators to be trained. The period must be focused on deliberate functional planning and training at the ground force level and within the immature aviation support arena. American advisors must look at their transition training programs and pursue a more holistic approach based on existing American models. It is not good enough that Iraqi squadrons are slowly standing up and executing occasional logistics and surveillance

missions.²⁴ This represents part of the requirement but simply misses the larger capability needed to attain mission success as demonstrated by aviation assets enabling current security, counterterror, and counterinsurgency operations. Greater attention must be focused on developing skills in communications, aviations delivered fires, airspace management, and formal training.

Communications

Not enough emphasis is being placed on communication skills and equipment. By this stage in the ground force transition, the purchase, distribution, and training with communication equipment should have been as high a priority as the purchase, distribution, and training with weapons. Communication skills and equipment knowledge are as critical as integrating and using individual weapons. In a counterterror or counterinsurgency fight, aviation assets become critical eyes and ears for the commanders in the field, as well as, a critical link for medical evacuation, logistics, and fires. Without the skill sets and equipment to coordinate and communicate via sophisticated communications equipment, there is no way a ground commander can leverage the aviation enabler.

This aspect of transition is not being executed.²⁵ Instead, the American team members supporting Iraqi ground forces are communicating with, coordinating and directing aviation assets. In order for there to be a true, independently operating ground force, they must be able to effectively communicate and coordinate with their support. In light of both nations' strategic admission that aviation will transition slower than ground forces, at some

24. Independent Commission On The Security Forces Of Iraq, *The Report Of The Independent Commission On The Security Forces of Iraq*, 72.

25. Based on the author's experience as an aviator during four separate flying tours in Iraq beginning at the start of combat operations and ending in May 2007. His last two tours were as a squadron commander in the Al Anbar province. After over 800 hours of combat flying, much in direct support of Iraqi ground forces or police, he has not once passed information directly to an Iraqi on a radio or been able to communicate immediate intelligence directly to a tactical Iraqi formation maneuvering on the ground.

point there may no longer be enough Americans on the ground to execute aviation coordination. Even now, Americans supporting Iraqi ground forces rarely have enough information on what is happening to provide adequate situational awareness to aviation assets when they are in support and can rarely find the correct Iraqi to pass information from aviation assets.²⁶ Until there are radios in the hands of and under the direct control of Iraqi ground force members, they will not be able to integrate fully aviation support.

If Iraqis' are not handed the proper tools now, while there are still Americans on the ground with them, they may never be able to accomplish the task without an American present. Ultimately they would certainly not bring the requisite skill sets needed to coordinate with an Iraqi aviation asset once the Iraqi Air Force takes over the skies of Iraq. Iraqis must be taught, shown, and then start executing. Without these skills aviation support will never be balanced with ground force capabilities.

American advisors are making a huge mistake by managing the responsibility for communicating and controlling the radios that are used to leverage aviation support. It is past time to force the system to function with Iraqi voices on the radios. Will it initially lead to frustration, confusion, and wasted time? Yes—just like when young lieutenants and sergeants are being taught and struggle through similar problems. All involved must realize there will be problems in the beginning, and American trainers must stand ready to take back the airwaves if a situation becomes too dangerous or out of control. However, the need to relinquish some of that control is necessary to achieve the desired outcome. Without increasing the communication skills of Iraqi ground forces, there will not be a balanced aviation transition.

26. Based on the author's experience as an aviator during four separate flying tours in Iraq beginning at the start of combat operations and ending in May 2007. His last two tours were as a squadron commander in the Al Anbar province.

Aviation Delivered Fires

Based on the current imbalance in transition, an American aviator could eventually deliver fires for an Iraqi commander with no American on the ground to oversee or control the fires. Under what guidance and authority will the American aviator deliver his ordnance? If we are not working towards defining rules of engagement, risks and mitigation, and the effects of improper fires execution with our Iraqi counterparts, we could put Americans at risk and in situations that may result in a very negative strategic impact.

In another scenario, in the absence of trained Iraqi controllers, an American terminal attack controller could eventually work for an independent Iraqi ground commander, executing that commander's desires for fire support with no American in the process to approve targeting, rules of engagement, or risk. This could lead to strategically impacting perceptions that an American is involved in delivering fires in ways that conflict with American policy.

Fires are some of the most challenging combat enablers that aviation assets provide. Aviation delivered fires are also a huge combat multiplier. Anything that has a major impact on a battlefield also comes with considerable risks if done improperly. This risk is magnified in an urban environment or in a counterinsurgency or counterterror role.

Current Iraqi Air Force structure is not designed to support ground formations in fires delivered from the air.²⁷ There was a deliberate decision made "not to equip the Iraqi Air Force with fixed-wing jet fighter or attack (bomber) aircraft. In fact, it [MNSTC-I] considers the assets unnecessary and incapable of influencing the counterinsurgency fight."²⁸ An

27. Independent Commission On The Security Forces Of Iraq, *The Report Of The Independent Commission On The Security Forces of Iraq*, 76-77.

28. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Stand up and Be Counted: The Continuing challenge of Building the Iraqi Security Forces*, 98.

interesting conclusion since so many American attack aircraft—fixed-wing and helicopter—are committed to current counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. The Iraqi's must pursue obtaining some form of attack aircraft capability. Current operations in Iraq prove the need for a limited attack capability.

Assuming the utility of attack aircraft in a counterinsurgency, American doctrine and procedures would indicate that it takes years to become proficient in the execution of aviation delivered fires²⁹—particularly those used to counter an insurgent or terror threat. This implies that American will be executing the mission for a considerable time.

Americans continue to coordinate and control the delivery of aviation fires—even when these fires are in direct support of Iraqi ground forces. Specific American ground force members train for months prior to coming into theater to have the level of qualification to be considered joint qualified to control the delivery of aviation fires.³⁰ Part of the Iraqi ground force transition to independent operations must include the control and coordination of aviation delivered fire.

Time must be spent at the designated training areas in Iraq with Iraqi ground force members controlling American aviation assets as they deliver fires. This would provide much needed proficiency training for American aviation units in theater and allow them to become familiar with the Iraqi forces they are supporting. American controllers qualified as terminal attack controllers could supervise and train Iraqi ground forces allowing them to

29. U.S. Marine Corps, *Aviation Training and Readiness (T&R) Manual, AH-1*, 10. Joint doctrine does not highlight training time since training and equipping is the responsibility of the individual services. This reference serves as an example of the length of time viewed necessary to train a combat qualified attack pilot. In the case of a U.S. Marine Corps AH-1W SuperCobra attack pilot it ranges from 18 to 24 months.

30. Deputy Commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command, To U.S. Army Operations Deputy, U.S. Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Air and Space Operations, U.S. Marine Corps Deputy Commandant for Plans Policy and Operations, U.S. Navy Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Plans Policy and Operations, Director Joint Staff, and U.S. Special Operations Command Director Operations Support Group, Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) (Ground) Memorandum of Agreement.

maintain proficiency in the perishable skills of controlling aviation fires. Most importantly, through a deliberate training program modeled after American armed force schools, Iraqis would be formally trained and qualified to control aviation fires and take one more step towards true independent operations. This type of training should be integrated up the chain of command to introduce and refine the deconfliction of fires, target approval and coordination, battle damage assessment determination, and rules of engagement training.

Airspace Management

Deconfliction of airspace is vital to aviation operations. There are many layers to this task. It begins at the highest levels of air tasking, order development, and targeting, and ends at the individual controllers that communicate with and control aircraft that pass through their assigned airspace. While there is occasional reference to the eventual need for Iraqi control and deconfliction of airspace, not enough action is being taken to ensure that capability once the Iraqi Air Force is ready to assume the role as an independent force.³¹ This function requires a depth of technical knowledge in procedures and equipment that can only come with time and training.

At this point in the transition process there should be future Iraqi command and control specialists sitting side-by-side with their American counterparts. These specialists should be completing on-the-job training, while observing the process that plans for future aviation needs, puts the orders together to get aviation assets to the end user, and then ensures that each aircraft launches, flies to, executes, and then returns to their airfield under the desired control and with the proper deconfliction. American and Iraqi aircraft should be hearing Iraqi voices on the other end of the radio providing them their direction. Like

31. Independent Commission On The Security Forces Of Iraq, *The Report Of The Independent Commission On The Security Forces of Iraq*, 72-77.

everything else, this would be under the direct supervision of a trained and experienced aviation command and control specialist. Without imbedded Iraqi command and control specialists working side-by-side in American aviation command and control centers, there will not be a balanced transition when the time comes for the Iraqis to assume the aviation role. Each delay in executing this detailed transition is another day, week, month, or year that an American will be sitting in Iraq supporting independent Iraqi ground force operations.

Formal Training Development

Aviation training and development goes well beyond buying a few airplanes and teaching people how to fly and fix them. Creating an effective member of a joint force requires detailed development and training that in some cases takes at a minimum months, and in some cases, years to build.

The Iraqi Air Force may not be mature enough to assume the roles and missions expected of a robust joint aviation force, and this is recognized in both nations' policy documents. However, the conditions and people exist in theater to do much more to ensure those combat enabling functions associated with aviation support are being developed in a more balanced approach. Training and development must be occurring now, particularly in those areas that connect a ground force to the aviation force.

Command and control and fires are two such examples of functional areas that have available American resources and assets in theater to begin a process of developing the baseline skills needed for effective transition in the future. Transitioning aviation support for a joint Iraqi security force must include all facets involved in aviation integration and not just training pilots, maintainers, and air field operators. The focus has to be on developing a professional cadre of aviation specialists that will be able to sustain itself. Developing

formal training systems designed to sustain a force and provide for systematic and documented professional development can do this. No better time exists to formalize and execute the needed training, whether at the lowest level of joint terminal attack controllers, or at the staff level of air tasking order and air space coordination order development. The models exist, the training templates are there, and experts are in the theater right now.³² American forces now overseeing the transition are very experienced in the training models and are experts in conducting that training.³³ The same training systems and programs used to train joint American forces should be used as models to develop aviation professionals in Iraq.

Summary of Recommendations

Iraqi ground forces are being developed and trained at a rapid pace and at the smallest unit level. Aviation training and support has been neglected. If changes are not made this imbalance will become significantly more difficult to overcome. There are solutions to the imbalance.

More refined training, based on existing American joint force training models must become commonplace within the aviation support structure in Iraq. Future Iraqi airspace controllers, terminal attack controllers, and aviators should be completing similar formal school programs and then sitting side-by-side with their American counterparts conducting on-the-job training. Members of the Iraqi security force should be learning the training system so they can sustain the process once the Americans are gone.

32. Multinational Security Transition Command – Iraq, “Coalition Air Force Transition Team (CAFTT). Also see: U.S. Joint Forces Command, “USJFCOM as Joint Trainer” for training opportunities and information on training models provided to the joint forces serving in Iraq.

33. U.S. Joint Forces Command, “USJFCOM as Joint Trainer.”

More Iraqi voices must be heard over radio nets as they learn to control and coordinate aviation assets at all levels. Air tasking orders and airspace coordination orders should be developed with Iraqi Air Force members side-by-side in the planning sessions. Iraqi ground forces must be trained on and have their own communication equipment to talk to aviation assets.

American aviators in theater now should be able to talk directly to and coordinate missions with Iraqi maneuver units without going through an American. At all levels, practical exercises requiring targeting boards and decision-making based on restrictive rules of engagement should be conducted and then executed with live fire training exercises to ensure the practices are in place for actual mission tasking.

Finally, a limited ability to provide aviation delivered fires must be pursued by the Iraqi government. Without the capability, American aircraft will not likely be able to leave the theater.

Conclusion

Aviation and aviation support functions have not been properly addressed in the military transition of American security forces to Iraqi security forces. An imbalance in military capability exists that will threaten future Iraqi security and lead to undesired risk to Americans. Much more effort has gone into the Iraqi ground force transition. Iraqi aviation transition centers on a few aircraft and about 900 people. A concerted effort must be made towards a focused training and equipping plan that will ensure functions of aviation are prepared to support and enable ground security operations.

Understandably, a lag will exist between the time that Iraqi ground forces are capable of independent operations and the time that Iraqi aviation forces are capable of conducting

independent operations. Current practices, however, are not significant enough to ensure a proper balance between the transitions of both forces. If not corrected, this imbalance has the potential for severe consequences.

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